

Belief, Re-identification and Fineness of Grain

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Abstract: The so-called 're-identification condition' (Kelly 2001) has played an important role in the most prominent argument for nonconceptualism, the argument from fineness of grain. A number of authors have recently argued that the condition should be modified or discarded altogether, with devastating implications for the nonconceptualist (see, e.g., Brewer 2005, Chuard 2006). The aim of this paper is to show that the situation is even more dire for nonconceptualists, for *even if* the re-identification condition remains in its original form, the argument from fineness of grain *still fails* to make the case for nonconceptualism. The paper's central case rests on two claims: according to the first, if the re-identification condition holds, then some *beliefs* will represent some properties nonconceptually; and according to the second, if some beliefs represent some properties nonconceptually, the argument from fineness of grain fails to make the case for nonconceptualism in any relevant sense. It follows that if the re-identification condition holds, the argument from fineness of grain fails to make the case for nonconceptualism.

The so-called 're-identification condition' (Kelly 2001) has played an important role in the most prominent argument for nonconceptualism, the argument from fineness of grain.¹ Very roughly, the condition states that in order for a subject *S* to represent a property *conceptually*, *S* must have the ability to re-identify instances of that property at different times.² The argument from fineness of grain proceeds to point out that perceptual experience often represents very fine-grained, determinate properties—the particular green shade of a cactus, or its determinate irregular shape—and that subjects are generally unable to re-identify these properties in the ways specified by the re-identification condition. Experience must therefore represent these fine-grained, determinate properties *nonconceptually*.

A number of authors have recently expressed worries about the strength and scope of the re-identification condition and have argued that it should be modified or dispensed with altogether. This has unfortunate implications for the nonconceptualist, since the argument from fineness of grain cannot succeed once the condition has been weakened or discarded (see, e.g., Brewer 2005; Chuard 2006). The aim of this paper is to show that the situation is even more dire for nonconceptualists, for *even if* the re-identification condition remains in its original form, the argument from fineness of grain *still fails* to make the case for nonconceptualism. This paper argues, in other words, that the re-identification condition actually serves to undermine the conclusion of the argument it purports to support.

The paper's central case rests on two claims defended in Section 2: according to the first, if the re-identification condition holds, then some *beliefs* will represent some properties nonconceptually; and according to the second, if some beliefs represent some properties nonconceptually, the argument from fineness of grain fails to make the case for nonconceptualism in an important sense. It follows that if the re-identification condition holds, the argument from fineness of grain fails to make the case for nonconceptualism.

A point of clarification: the aim of this paper isn't to argue against non-conceptualism but rather to show that the argument from fineness of grain cannot be used to make the case for nonconceptualism *even if* the re-identification condition remains unmodified. This suggests that nonconceptualists should shift their focus away from arguments relying on the condition entirely and attempt instead to develop and strengthen other arguments for their view.³ The paper begins with a background discussion, in Section 1, of the fineness of grain argument and the re-identification condition; it ends, in Section 3, with the consideration and rejection of replies on behalf of the nonconceptualist.

1. Experience and Re-identification

1.1 *The Conceptual/Nonconceptual Debate*

The debate between conceptualists and nonconceptualists has been notoriously difficult to navigate, in part because it involves *two* distinct debates which weren't carefully distinguished until recently (see Heck 2000; Byrne 2003; 2005; Speaks 2005). Though these two debates have the same goal, namely to determine the degree to which experiential states are like belief states, their emphases are quite different. The so-called 'content' debate is concerned, as its name suggests, with *contents*⁴: its proponents disagree about whether belief and experiential states have contents *of the same kind*. Content-conceptualists claim that experience and belief *do* have contents of the same kind—in other words, the content of an experience is of such a kind that it could be the content of a belief. Content-nonconceptualists, meanwhile, deny that experience and belief have contents of the same kind. Since it is widely assumed that concepts are the sole constituents of belief contents, the debate is often described as pitting those who claim that experiential contents, like belief contents, take concepts (and concepts only) as constituents—i.e., the content-conceptualists—against those who claim that experiential contents, *unlike* belief-contents, have (at least some) constituents that aren't concepts—i.e., the content-nonconceptualists.

By contrast, the so-called 'state' debate is concerned with the relation between the tokening of a state (belief or experience) and concept-possession. Its participants disagree specifically about whether concept-possession is a necessary condition for the tokening of relevant *experiences*. Since it is widely assumed, in this debate, that possessing the concept RED (i.e., being able to token a belief with the conceptual constituent RED) is a necessary condition for having a *belief*

that a tomato is red, the debate can be described as pitting those who claim that possessing the relevant concepts is a necessary condition for tokening the relevant *experience*—i.e., state-conceptualists—against those who deny that this is the case—i.e., state-nonconceptualists.⁵

It is important to note that the two debates are *not* equivalent. The truth of *state-nonconceptualism* does not entail the truth of *content-nonconceptualism*. To see this, assume *state-nonconceptualism* is true; e.g., assume that *being able* to think a thought with the concept RED is not a necessary condition for tokening an experience of red. A thinker may therefore undergo an experience of red and yet be unable to token a belief whose content includes the concept RED. This fact does not entail the truth of *content-nonconceptualism*: it does not entail, that is, that the *content* of an experience of red is of a different *kind* from the content of belief. That our thinker is unable to token a belief with the concept RED doesn't entail that the *content* of her experience of red is such that it could not possibly be believed. In fact, the truth of *state-nonconceptualism* entails nothing at all about how experience represents the property of redness.^{6,7}

Perhaps unsurprisingly, most philosophers purport to contribute to the *content* debate, even when they unwittingly contribute to the *state* debate. Tye's (2000) fineness of grain argument, for instance, turns out to be an argument for state-conceptualism. Since subjects often have experiences that represent shades of colour, like red₁₇, without having stored mental representations of them—and since having a stored mental representation of a property such as red₁₇ is required to possess the concept RED₁₇—Tye concludes that experience is non-conceptual. As Byrne (2003) and Speaks (2005) both point out, Tye's argument here and arguments like it show at most that possessing a concept like RED₁₇ is not a necessary condition for *experiencing* the property it picks out, i.e., red₁₇. Such an argument, in other words, 'establishes at best the state view' (Byrne 2003: 17). Byrne adds:

For all this argument says, a subject's visual experience might have the content that, say, a certain tomato is red¹⁹, where the proposition that the tomato is red¹⁹ is the very same kind of proposition—a Fregean Thought, perhaps—that she can believe. (ibid.)

Despite all this, Tye indeed seems to hold the content view. After all, it is the content view (which Tye explicitly attempts to defend in later work, e.g., Tye 2006) that makes sense of Tye's overarching project and of projects like his which aim to explain the phenomenology of *experience* in terms of experiential *contents*.⁸ It is also the *content* debate—and not the *state* debate—whose outcome seems to bear on the epistemological question that leads a number of philosophers to the debate: a question about how experiential states can ever justify belief states if their contents are of different *kinds*⁹ (see, e.g., Brewer 1999; 2005; Dokic and Pacherie 2001; McDowell 1994). As a result, the discussion in this paper will be located within the *content* debate and its focus will be the version of the argument from fineness of grain that constitutes an argument for *content-nonconceptualism*.¹⁰ In the remainder of the paper, the terms 'conceptualism'

and 'nonconceptualism' should be understood as standing for 'content-conceptualism' and 'content-nonconceptualism'.

1.2 The Re-identification Condition

The argument from fineness of grain appeals to a so-called 're-identification condition'—a condition which must be met if a subject is to represent a particular perceptual property *conceptually*.¹¹ Chuard (2006) provides a detailed discussion of the various re-identification conditions deployed in the literature. The focus here will be on a version of the condition that is most likely to ensure that the argument from fineness of grain is valid. That version of the re-identification condition—which I'll call RC—can be stated as follows (this is an extension of Chuard's 2006 formulation¹²):

(RC) For any perceptual property p to be represented by a subject S using a concept C , S must be able to:

- (i) identify some object as having p at some time t ;
- (ii) identify some object as having p at time $t + 1$;
- (iii) be aware that the property p identified at $t + 1$ is the *same property* p identified at t
- (iv) re-identify p at $t + 1$ as the same property p perceived at t based only on the experience and memory of p ; and
- (v) t and $t + 1$ must be separated by an interval during which S has *no* experience of p .

To see the condition at work, imagine that a subject, Lisa, is attending to a canvas sprinkled with drops of green paint and is focusing her attention on a drop which has a particular, determinate colour property, say green_{17} .¹³ According to RC, in order for Lisa's experience to represent this property of the paint-drop conceptually, Lisa must first be able to (i) identify the drop as being green_{17} at t , and then (ii) identify that drop (or another drop) as being green_{17} at some later time $t + 1$. The third condition requires that Lisa *realize*, when she perceives the drop as being green_{17} at $t + 1$, that this is the very same property she perceived the drop as having earlier, at t .¹⁴ And, indeed, this is what we typically require for re-identification in ordinary cases: subjects who fail to notice that the property they are now perceiving is the same one they were perceiving earlier are not usually said to have re-identified it. In other words, for Lisa to meet the Re-identification Condition, she must (iii) be aware that the two properties she attributes to the drops at t and $t + 1$ are the *same property* green_{17} . This isn't enough, however. For, intuitively speaking, it seems that were Lisa to notice, at t , that the drop she's attending to is the third one from the bottom left corner of the canvas, and were she to re-identify the shade at $t + 1$ by *counting the drops from the bottom left corner*, she would fail to meet RC. Indeed, if Lisa must rely on information about the location of the paint drop (or its size, shape, etc.) in

order to make a judgement about its colour, it seems that she is not actually re-identifying the *colour* itself. Our intuitions suggest that genuine re-identification of a given perceptual property should be based on a subject's experience of *that property* at some time $t + 1$ together with the perceptual memory of *that property* which was perceived earlier. In other words, in order for Lisa to truly re-identify green₁₇ in the way specified by RC, she must rely on her *experience* of a particular shade and her memory of said shade only.

Finally, were Lisa to look at the green₁₇ drop and keep her gaze focused on that very drop as the canvas was moved across the studio before re-identifying the shade, she would not necessarily meet RC either. Indeed, she must be able to close her eyes, or look away or in some other way (v) *stop* experiencing the shade in question in order to meet the condition.¹⁵ It is worth pointing out, as Kelly (2001) himself does, that the length of the interval between t and $t + 1$ can be quite short. Clearly, RC cannot require that one be able to re-identify a property five or ten years after having experienced it. But as long as the experience of the property can be interrupted while subjects retain the capacity to re-identify it, they will have met (v). Note that the fact that RC requires re-identification of a property after an interval of no experience, however short, suggests that it requires the storage in *memory* (at time t) of relevant representations and the retrieval at $t + 1$ of these representations. Condition (iv) specifies that it is a representation of the relevant property (of the *shade* green₁₇ in Lisa's case) that must be stored and retrieved, as opposed to representations of the location (or size, shape, etc.) of an individual object that instantiates that property.¹⁶

RC, as described above, has struck a number of writers as a rather intuitive condition on perceptual (or observational) concepts, like GREEN and ROUND. Chuard writes that:

most participants in the dispute, we can assume, agree that something like [RC] governs the possession of normal non-demonstrative concepts like *red*, *car*, *kangaroo*, etc. . . . At first sight, this is not implausible: we often interpret failures to re-identify red things as evidence that a subject has no concept for redness. (Chuard 2006: 170)

Similarly, Dokic and Pacherie claim that:

it seems plausible to suppose that mastery of an observational concept implies a capacity to identify and re-identify perceptual instances of the concept. This means that, to have a concept of a given colour shade, one must be able to recognize coloured objects over time. (Dokic and Pacherie 2001: 197–8)

And even some *conceptualists* take there to be such a condition on perceptual concepts. McDowell, in an oft-quoted passage, says:

what ensures that it is a concept, what ensures that thoughts that exploit it have the necessary distance from what would determine it to be true, is that the associated [recognitional] capacity can persist into the future, if only for a short time . . . (McDowell 1994: 57)

Of course, however plausible RC may be as a condition on some general perceptual concepts, like GREEN, or CAR, it is clearly not a plausible condition on *all* concepts. First, it is clearly not a condition on concepts that pick out imperceptible properties, such as the concept JUSTICE.¹⁷ Second, RC is not a condition on concepts that pick out perceptual properties *deferentially*.¹⁸ After all, it seems clear that it is possible for thinkers to represent objects conceptually without being able to identify—let alone re-identify—them, so long as thinkers defer to experts about the referents of these concepts.

1.3 *The Argument from Fineness of Grain*

The argument from fineness of grain takes the re-identification condition as a premise, along with three other claims, and it can be schematized as follows:

[P1] RC: In order for a subject S to represent a property *p* conceptually, S must be able to re-identify *p* as specified in (i)–(v) above.

[P2] Subjects represent fine-grained properties, like green₁₇, in experience.

[P3] Subjects do, or could, lack the ability to re-identify these properties as specified in (i)–(v).

[P4] Subjects do *not* represent fine-grained properties in experience *deferentially*.

Therefore,

[C1] Subjects do not represent fine-grained properties in experience *conceptually*.

Therefore,

[C2] Experiential content is unlike the content of belief in that it is at least partly nonconceptual.¹⁹

Premises [P2], [P3] and [P4] are supposed to be fairly uncontroversial. Interestingly, [P3] can be understood as making either of two claims. The first is an empirical claim, to the effect that human subjects are quite bad at re-identifying fine-grained properties (see, e.g., Raffman 1995). Some of the empirical evidence supporting such a claim is anecdotal, drawing from familiar scenarios (not unlike the one above) involving rows of paint chips in hardware stores. Most subjects are, indeed, unable to re-identify, based on current experience and memory of its shade alone, a colour they'd picked out as a good candidate for a bedroom wall just seconds earlier. But arguments from fineness of grain *need not* depend on the truth of these empirical claims and [P3] need not be interpreted as such. Indeed, some arguments from fineness of grain (including Kelly's (2001) argument) appeal primarily to the fact that it is (naturally) *possible* for a human subject's experience to represent a property she couldn't

re-identify.²⁰ Given that re-identification depends crucially on memory, all that is needed is the (natural) *possibility* that a thinker have a memory bad enough that she be unable to re-identify some fine-grained properties her experience represents. This is all the argument from fineness of grain requires, for it will follow, then, that human experience is a kind of state which, unlike belief, *can* have constituents that aren't concepts.

[P4], which claims that experience does not represent properties deferentially, is not usually made explicit in statements of the argument, possibly because it seems so obviously true as to be barely worth stating. Indeed it seems clearly true that we could not—in experience—defer to experts about what we experience. Still, for the purposes of this paper, it is worth highlighting the fact that RC—in its 'original' form—entails that someone who cannot re-identify a property must represent it nonconceptually *only if* we can rule out other ways of conceptually representing the property in question.

1.4 Fineness of Grain and Demonstratives

Conceptualists are fond of blocking arguments from fineness of grain by appealing to demonstrative concepts. The move can be construed as a *state*-conceptualist move against *state*-nonconceptualism, motivated by the observation that *even if* experience does indeed represent fine-grained properties for which subjects possess no general, context-independent concepts, still the subjects of experience may possess context-dependent, *demonstrative* concepts of these fine-grained properties. The problem with the argument from fineness of grain (for state-nonconceptualism) therefore seems to be that it takes 'an unduly restrictive view of concepts as necessarily corresponding to entirely context-independent classifications of things' (Dokic and Pacherie 2001), forgetting meanwhile the existence of context-dependent *demonstrative* concepts.²¹ State-conceptualists conclude that fineness of grain arguments fail to establish the falsity of their view: these arguments fail to show that the possession of *some* concept (context-independent or not) is not in fact a necessary condition for tokening an experience representing the concept's fine-grained referent.

Of course, the focus of this paper is on the *content*-nonconceptualist argument from fineness of grain, and content-conceptualists too may want to appeal to demonstrative concepts to diffuse *that* version of the argument. Indeed a content-conceptualist may argue that it seems possible for fine-grained properties to be represented by a subject S conceptually without the subject either meeting RC or tokening a deferential concept, if S represents these properties *demonstratively*.²² Conceptualists may think that the argument for *content*-nonconceptualism also takes a restrictive view of concepts, assuming that concepts either must meet RC or must be deferential. If, however, a subject can represent fine-grained properties using demonstrative concepts *without meeting* RC, the conclusions of the argument from fineness of grain stated above simply do not follow from its premises [P1]–[P4].

Interestingly, of course, the goal of Kelly's (2001) paper is precisely to argue that RC *is* a condition on perceptual demonstrative concepts.²³ The fact that we can use general concepts deferentially leads Kelly to urge caution when applying the condition to general perceptual concepts, however plausible such an application may seem. He writes:

if it is possible to possess a general concept in virtue of one's capacity to defer to an expert user of terms that express that concept, then it will be possible to possess the concept without being able to satisfy the re-identification condition. (Kelly 2001: 407)

But, Kelly adds, 'this consideration isn't relevant in the case of demonstrative concepts' (ibid.). He concludes that RC *is* a condition on perceptual demonstrative concepts which entails, it would seem, that the argument from fineness of grain is valid after all. For if RC holds as a condition on perceptual demonstratives, then the conceptualist is wrong when she argues that subjects who don't meet RC could represent fine-grained properties in experience using demonstrative concepts. Experience must therefore represent fine-grained properties *nonconceptually*.²⁴

2. Belief and Re-identification

Critics of the argument from fineness of grain usually deny that RC is a condition on demonstrative concepts. These critics claim that RC requires too much, and that it is possible for subjects to represent properties using demonstrative concepts even if they don't meet the condition. Brewer (2005) suggests, for instance, that requiring an interval of no experience is not needed: if a thinker can *track* a fine-grained property as environmental conditions change—as Lisa would be able to do if she kept her attention focused on the relevant drop while the canvas was moved—then the thinker should count as representing the property using a demonstrative concept.²⁵ Chuard (2006) also argues that RC as originally formulated simply cannot be a condition on demonstrative concepts. This section of the paper attempts to show that *even if* we grant that RC *is* in fact a condition on demonstrative concepts, the argument from fineness of grain still fails to make the case for nonconceptualism. The argument proceeds in two steps. According to the first, if RC holds, some belief-contents will have nonconceptual constituents (Section 2.1); according to the second, if some belief-contents have nonconceptual constituents, the argument from fineness of grain fails to make the case for nonconceptualism (Section 2.2).

2.1 Belief and Fineness of Grain

We begin by considering what RC, as originally formulated, entails about *beliefs* that represent fine-grained properties. Imagine, then, that our subject Lisa is

attending to the shade of the green₁₇ paint-drop. As we did earlier, let us stipulate that Lisa does not meet RC. According to the nonconceptualist, this entails that Lisa's experience isn't representing green₁₇ using a demonstrative (or any) concept. Now imagine that while attending to green₁₇, Lisa comes to utter the following English sentence:

(S1) This is the perfect shade for my poster.

The *belief* that (S1) expresses, in this case, represents a fine-grained property (green₁₇). However, assuming that RC is a condition on demonstrative concepts will entail that the belief expressed by Lisa with (S1) cannot represent green₁₇ using a demonstrative *concept*. Indeed we stipulated that Lisa does *not* meet RC, and it is this very fact that enables the nonconceptualist to argue that her *experience* doesn't represent green₁₇ using a demonstrative concept. If RC holds, then it follows not only that Lisa's *experience* cannot represent green₁₇ using a demonstrative concept, but that the belief she expresses with the demonstrative sentence (S1) does not represent green₁₇ using a demonstrative concept either. The exact reasoning which led the nonconceptualist to conclude that Lisa's experience does not represent green₁₇, leads to the conclusion that Lisa's *belief* cannot represent green₁₇ using a demonstrative concept.

Moreover, since we are assuming that RC holds as originally formulated, we are assuming that it is a condition on perceptual demonstrative concepts and on non-deferential perceptual concepts, such as GREEN or ROUND. This means that since Lisa doesn't meet RC, her *belief* cannot represent green₁₇ using a perceptual demonstrative, *or* a non-deferential perceptual concept. And though it isn't absurd to suppose that Lisa represents green₁₇ *deferentially* when she tokens the belief she expresses with (S1), it does seem highly implausible that this would be the case. For the constituent of the belief-content corresponding to Lisa's demonstrative expression 'this' does not pick out green₁₇ based on her capacity to defer to experts about colour shades. Were all color experts to vanish, or had they never existed, Lisa could still manage to refer to that very shade of green—for she picks it out based on her capacity to focus her attention on the relevant property and demonstrate it.

What, then, are we to say about the belief Lisa expresses with (S1)? It would seem that Lisa's belief simply cannot be representing the fine-grained shade she demonstrates using 1) a deferential concept (she's not relying on experts), 2) a non-deferential perceptual concept (RC isn't met) or 3) a perceptual demonstrative concept (RC isn't met). Reasoning as the nonconceptualist did in the argument from fineness of grain, we should conclude that Lisa's belief must represent the shade in question *nonconceptually*. In other words, if RC holds, then some *belief-contents* will have constituents that are not concepts.

Notice that to claim that belief-contents may have nonconceptual constituents isn't necessarily unreasonable. It does go against the general assumption in the 'content' debate that concepts, and concepts only, are the constituents of belief. However it isn't clear what motivates the claim that concepts are the only possible constituents of belief. After all, regardless of one's ontology, concepts

will turn out to be ‘objects’ (mental representations or abstract constituents of propositions) of a *certain kind*, where the kind in question remains to be delineated.²⁶ It is possible, of course, to delineate the relevant kind in such a way as to guarantee that they are the only possible constituents of belief-contents. After all, it is possible to simply assert that any constituent of belief is thereby a concept regardless of what other features it may have. This leaves open the possibility that some of these concepts could be the constituents of experiential contents, even as it rules out the possibility that belief-contents could have nonconceptual constituents. But such a characterization is quite empty, since it fails to identify any interesting, or salient, features of concepts as a kind. It is no wonder, then, that concepts are never actually characterized this way. Instead concepts are claimed to be objects with certain sorts of salient features, and this leaves open the possibility that some constituents of belief-contents *may not have the requisite features*. Of course, RC is just such a characterization of concepts.²⁷ It shouldn’t be especially surprising, therefore, that if RC is in fact a condition on concepts, then some constituents of belief-contents may not be concepts. According to RC, concepts are objects which meet (i)–(v) above, and though these are indeed features that many constituents of belief-contents will possess, it is by no means necessary that *every* constituent of belief-contents *must* meet RC.

Now, as a condition on non-deferential perceptual and demonstrative concepts, RC is a condition on these concepts (‘objects’) generally, regardless of whether they happen to be constituents of belief- or experiential contents. For a subject to represent a property using a (nondeferential perceptual or demonstrative) concept, whether in experience *or in belief* (or really in any other state) the constituents of her experiential or belief-content must possess the relevant features. Conversely, a subject whose representational constituents lack the relevant features will not represent the relevant properties using a concept whether in the content of experience *or in that belief*. Those who endorse RC in its original form, as proponents of the argument from fineness of grain seem to do, should be willing to accept that some of the constituents of *belief-contents* may not technically be *concepts*. And this is precisely what nonconceptualists would have to say about beliefs expressed by sentences like (S1): Lisa, in tokening these beliefs, is representing the fine-grained property green₁₇ nonconceptually.

One last observation: this may cohere nicely with recent accounts of demonstrative thoughts—for instance, Levine (2010)—according to which the key demonstrative constituents of these thoughts are *pointers*.²⁸ The role of these pointers, according to Levine, is to select a bit of another mental representation (say a visual perceptual one) and to use *it* to represent the world. On such accounts, when one utters a sentence like (S1), the demonstrative expression expresses a pointer, a mental constituent which directs attention to the visual representation of the green shade and, using that visual representation, succeeds in picking out the shade represented visually. Most importantly, since demonstrative constituents of beliefs expressed by sentences like (S1) are thought to be pointers whose content will change depending on the direction of attention, they

are unlikely to be the sorts of things that can be stored in memory. In other words, pointers may not meet RC and they may therefore be, in some sense, *nonconceptual* constituents of belief. In any case, it looks as though RC, in its original form, entails that some beliefs will represent some fine-grained properties nonconceptually.

2.2 Making the Case for Nonconceptualism

Though I just argued, in the preceding section, that there is nothing inconsistent about claiming that some belief-contents have some nonconceptual constituents, this fact does ultimately undermine the case for nonconceptualism. Indeed, the 'content' debate between conceptualists and nonconceptualists as described earlier is a debate about whether experience and belief have the *same kind* of contents. This entails that for any argument to truly be an argument for *content-nonconceptualism*, it must show not only that experience at least sometimes represents the world using constituents that aren't concepts but also that *belief does not*. It is no wonder, then, that proponents in the content debate generally assume that belief-contents take concepts *and concepts only* as constituents—for this assumption ensures that if some of the constituents of experiential contents are not concepts, then experience will indeed be unlike belief in the relevant respect. However, as the previous section suggests, endorsing RC in its original form undermines the 'content' debate's general assumption about belief, because if RC holds, some constituents of belief-contents may not be *concepts*. The fact that some constituents of *experience* are not concepts now fails to entail that belief- and experiential contents have constituents of different kinds. Indeed, if RC holds in its original form, then the argument from fineness of grain's first conclusion [C1]—according to which *subjects do not represent fine-grained properties in experience using concepts*—does not entail [C2]—that *experience is unlike belief in that it is at least partly nonconceptual*. In other words, though RC as originally stated plays a crucial role in getting the nonconceptualist to show that *experience* represents some properties nonconceptually, it simultaneously prevents the nonconceptualist from making the case that *experience* is *unlike belief* in this respect.

Nonconceptualists may suggest, in response, that RC should be slightly modified to avoid this conclusion—as long as it is modified in *the right way*.²⁹ They may insist, for instance, that it is possible for a subject to meet RC—to represent a fine-grained property *conceptually*—so long as she is able to re-identify the relevant property based on her perceptual experience and memory of the shade *together with* any other information she might have, such as information about the location of objects. If RC requires re-identification of this weaker kind, then nonconceptualists can deny that the content of the belief Lisa expresses with (S1) must have a constituent that is not a concept, since Lisa now meets RC. Unfortunately, no such move can succeed, for two reasons. First, if RC is modified so as to ensure that Lisa meets it, the nonconceptualist will indeed be able to deny that she must represent green₁₇ nonconceptually in

thought, but it will also entail that Lisa's *experience* could represent green₁₇ conceptually. Second, after RC is modified, it is possible to re-describe Lisa in a way that guarantees that she fails to meet it. Lisa's memory only need be bad enough, and she will fail to re-identify a particular shade based on the modified criteria. In such a re-described case, the modified RC will entail Lisa could not represent green₁₇ *conceptually* whether in experience or in thought, hence failing to entail that experience and thought have contents of different kinds. This highlights, once more, a crucial feature of RC, namely the fact that it is a condition on *concepts* generally—regardless of whether they figure in experiential or in belief-contents. This suggests that nonconceptualists face a dilemma. Either RC is characterized in such a way that it entails that *experience* represents fine-grained properties nonconceptually, in which case it will also entail that *belief* represents some fine-grained properties *nonconceptually*; or RC is characterized so as to ensure that subjects who represent fine-grained properties in *thought* meet RC; i.e., that they represent said properties conceptually. Either way, however, we have no reason to conclude that the contents of experience and belief are different kinds of contents; i.e., RC fails to support nonconceptualism.

3. Objections and Replies

The argument just presented depends on two crucial claims which may rightfully be called into question by proponents of the argument from fineness of grain. The first concerns the very structure of the debate between conceptualists and nonconceptualists. Indeed, I have assumed that making the case for nonconceptualism requires making the case that experience and belief have contents of different kinds. A nonconceptualist may object that I have mischaracterized the debate. Second, I have assumed that perceptual properties can be represented conceptually in *three* ways: either using a non-deferential perceptual concept, or using a deferential concept, or using a perceptual demonstrative. One may argue, however, that I have failed to consider the possibility that perceptual properties could be represented conceptually using complex descriptions, such as, e.g., THE SHADE I'M LOOKING AT. I end the paper by considering these two objections and showing why they fail to provide a compelling defence of the nonconceptualist's argument from fineness of grain.

3.1 The Conceptual/Nonconceptual Debate

As mentioned in Section 1, the paper assumes that the debate between conceptualists and nonconceptualists is essentially a debate about the *content* of experience and belief. However, the paper further assumes that the goal of the content debate is to make a *comparative* claim concerning these contents, with the nonconceptualist claiming that a) experiential and belief-contents are contents of *different kinds*, and the conceptualist claiming that a*) experiential and

belief-contents are *of the same kind*. Unfortunately, it seems possible to grant that the conceptual/nonconceptual debate is essentially a debate about *content* while denying the centrality of these comparative claims. The nonconceptualist may primarily hope to show that b) some of the constituents of experience are not concepts, while the conceptualist may primarily aim to argue that b*) all the constituents of experience are concepts. It is true that these claims about experiential contents will entail further comparative claims when considered in tandem with additional claims about the constituents of *belief*-contents. But why assume, as this paper has, that the main goal of the debate is to settle the truth of the comparative claims a) and a*) and not to settle the truth of the claims about experience b) and b*)?³⁰

The point can be put into sharper focus if we acknowledge the fact that some nonconceptualists may not be very interested in establishing the truth of the comparative claim which I maintain their argument from fineness of grain aims to support. Such a nonconceptualist may be perfectly happy to believe instead that a*) experiential and belief-contents are *of the same kind*, or to remain entirely uncommitted when it comes to the truth of comparative claims like a) and a*). What makes her a nonconceptualist nonetheless is the sole fact that she believes that b) some of the constituents of experience are not concepts. Such a nonconceptualist does not, at this juncture, have any reason to think that the argument from fineness of grain and its re-identification condition have failed her. For all I have argued here, endorsing the re-identification condition prevents those nonconceptualists who hope to establish the truth of the claim that experiential and belief-contents are contents *of different kinds* from reaching *their* conclusion. It does nothing, however, to undermine a more modest nonconceptualist whose only nonconceptualist goal is to argue that b) some of the constituents of experiential contents are not concepts.

The point is well taken. The argument in this paper does not entail that the argument from fineness of grain undermines the 'modest' nonconceptualist. However, it seems that most nonconceptualists are not in fact so modest. Most nonconceptualists *are*, whether they realize it or not, interested in defending the truth of a) that experiential and belief-contents are contents *of different kinds*. Most nonconceptualists, then, will find that endorsing the re-identification condition will prevent them from using the argument from fineness of grain to make their case. Indeed, as I'll argue now, a review of some of the most prominent nonconceptualist arguments suggests that nonconceptualists are motivated by the existence of contrasts between belief and experience which in turn primarily support the comparative conclusion that experiential and belief-contents are contents of different kinds. This comparative claim will of course have implications about the constituents of experiential contents given further assumptions about the nature of belief-contents. Still, given the arguments they provide, it seems that it is the relation between experiential and belief-contents which concerns nonconceptualists the most.

Consider, first, the various arguments for nonconceptualism that emphasize features of experience that are *not* features of belief. These arguments (which

include the argument from fineness of grain) emphasize quite explicitly *differences* between belief and experiential states. For instance, they highlight the fact that experience, *unlike belief*, can represent contradictory or impossible states of affairs (see, e.g., Crane 1988), or that experiential content, *unlike belief-content*, is rich, or analog, or fine-grained, or situation-dependent (see, e.g., Dretske 1981; Tye 2006; Kelly 2001; Siegel 2011), or that it has a distinctive phenomenology, namely a phenomenology that is *unlike that of belief* (see, e.g., Peacocke 2001; Tye 1995; 2000). The fact that these arguments centrally draw a contrast between experience and belief makes it unlikely that the (content-) nonconceptualists who present and defend these arguments have no interest in *establishing* a contrastive claim concerning the contents of the relevant states.

It is possible, however, for a more modest nonconceptualist to ignore the contrastive claims that usually motivate arguments for nonconceptualism and focus entirely on *experience*. Such a modest nonconceptualist aims only to argue for the (noncomparative) conclusion that b) some of the constituents of experiential contents are not concepts, and as far as she's concerned, the argument from fineness of grain discussed in this paper does a fine job of making the case for (modest) nonconceptualism. Indeed, my claims in this paper do not undermine nonconceptualism so (modestly) construed. The modest nonconceptualist ought to notice, however, that endorsing RC as part of an argument from fineness of grain *commits* her to endorsing further claims about the constituents of belief-contents. That is because the very reasoning (using RC) with which the modest nonconceptualist reaches her modest conclusion also supports the claim that *belief-contents* are partly nonconceptual. Whether or not she *cares* about belief contents at all, a modest nonconceptualist is nonetheless committed to a substantial claim about them, which in turn will have implications for the truth of comparative claims.

Standard nonconceptualist arguments therefore suggest that nonconceptualists are for the most part concerned with questions about the nature of both experiential *and* belief-contents and whether they are contents of the same kind. This means that nonconceptualists who use RC should indeed worry about its implication for the constituents of *belief*. If RC entails not merely that experiential contents are partly nonconceptual but that belief-contents are partly nonconceptual as well, RC fails to support the case for *nonconceptualism* in the comparative sense. Modest nonconceptualists can use RC to support *nonconceptualism* as they construe it, but their commitment to the truth of RC commits them to the truth of unexpected claims about belief-contents—that they are partly nonconceptual—and about how they do *not* differ from experiential contents—belief-contents are partly nonconceptual *in just the way that experiential contents are*.

3.2 Demonstratives vs. Definite Descriptions

The case made here assumes—explicitly so, see Section 2.3—that there are three ways for a subject to represent a fine-grained perceptual property conceptually:

either she will do so using a general perceptual non-deferential concept, or using a deferential concept, or using a perceptual demonstrative concept. As mentioned several times, RC in its original form is a condition on both general non-deferential perceptual concepts and on perceptual demonstrative concepts, though it's not a condition on deferential perceptual concepts. But a nonconceptualist may claim that a fourth possibility has been ignored: that a subject could represent a fine-grained perceptual property using a *definite description*. Lisa could represent green₁₇ as 'the artist's least favourite shade'; or as 'the shade I singled out the first time I looked at the canvas', and so forth. Consider, then, a case in which Lisa while attending to green₁₇ utters the demonstrative sentence:

(S1) This is the perfect shade for my poster.

Nonconceptualists can claim that the *belief* expressed by (S1) is not a genuine *demonstrative* belief but is rather a thought whose first constituent is a 'covert' definite description, such as 'the shade I am attending to'. Descriptions like these, it would seem, can be wholly conceptual, *and* they can be used by subjects to pick out fine-grained properties that they may not be able to re-identify. Nonconceptualists are now in a position to deny what I claimed was true in Section 2.1: they can deny that endorsing RC will entail that some constituents of beliefs will not be concepts. Importantly, they can simultaneously deny that fine-grained shades are represented conceptually in the way they are represented in thought. Indeed, it seems quite unlikely for green₁₇ to be represented in Lisa's *experience* by a description like 'the shade I am attending to now'. The definite description makes reference to what is being *attended* to, and it is unlikely that the concept of ATTENTION could itself be a constituent of the content of experience. The argument from fineness of grain can now go through. Green₁₇ is represented in Lisa's *experience* nonconceptually but it is represented in her belief by a complex (*conceptual*) description. Experience does have some constituents that are of a different kind from the constituents of belief after all.

This nonconceptualist rejoinder is problematic for at least two reasons. First, nonconceptualists themselves believe that it is unlikely for a subject's *experience* to represent fine-grained properties by deploying the concept ATTENTION (or any other related concept). This is because it seems possible, nonconceptualists argue, for a subject's experience to represent, e.g., green₁₇ without possessing the general concepts involved in this sort of description, such as the concept ATTENTION or SHADE (see for instance Peacocke 2001). But if we assume nonconceptualists are right here, what might they say about such a subject were she to *think* about a particular, fine-grained shade represented in her experience? How is that fine-grained shade represented in the subject's belief that it's pretty, say?³¹ The fine-grained properties, in such a case, cannot be represented using a description such as 'the shade I am attending to'—since the subject does not possess that concept—and these properties cannot be represented by perceptual demonstrative *concepts* or perceptual non-deferential concepts—for reasons discussed earlier in the paper. This appears to leave only one possibility: the

constituent of her belief that represents the fine-grained shade is *not* a concept.³² Belief-contents are partly nonconceptual.

But there is another reason to be deeply sceptical of an appeal to hidden descriptions. The plausibility of such an appeal depends on the plausibility of the claim that sentences like (S1), uttered while attention is being directed at a particular shade, express beliefs that are devoid of any *demonstrative constituents*.³³ There is nothing inherently wrong with claiming that sentences of a natural language that share a similar surface structure may in fact express beliefs with different constituents and internal structures. However, positing differing internal structure ought to be done for good explanatory reason. Imagine, for instance, that Lisa utters sentence (S1) a few hours after having left the painting studio, while thinking back to the shade.

(S1) This is the perfect shade for my poster.

Lisa, both *while* attending to the shade and afterwards, utters the exact same sentence, however, we have reason to think that the beliefs expressed by the two sentences are not the same. Indeed, we have reason to think that Lisa's demonstrative *expression*, uttered outside the studio, may not express the *demonstrative concept* we assumed her demonstrative expression expressed earlier. This is because, while looking at the paint drop, Lisa's expression refers to the shade by virtue of her attending to the relevant property while experiencing it. But, having left, her thinking back about the shade is not mediated by attention to a currently experienced property. In fact, since by stipulation, Lisa cannot re-identify the shade, she is not *remembering* the shade and attending to her stored memory representation of it. This gives us reason to think that though the demonstrative expressions may sound the same when uttered, they may in fact express different concepts. In other words, we have reason to think that the demonstrative expression in the second uttering of (S1) may not express a genuine demonstrative concept, but may instead express a description such as THE SHADE I ATTENDED TO EARLIER. Similarly, when Russell argues that sentences of the form 'An A is F', or 'The A is F' actually have complex hidden logical structures, he does so because positing such structures does quite a bit of explanatory work. Indeed, it enables him to explain how sentences like 'Pegasus does not exist' can be meaningful without committing him to the claim that certain expressions refer to nonexistent objects. And notoriously, it also enables him to explain how certain a posteriori identity claims, such as 'Hesperus is Phosphorus', can be cognitively significant.

By contrast, it is not clear that the nonconceptualist has good explanatory reason for maintaining that sentences like (S1) uttered *while* attention is being directed at an experienced property nonetheless do not express a genuine *demonstrative thought*. If the only reason supporting the nonconceptualist's claim is that her claim is compatible with the truth of nonconceptualism, then the argument from fineness of grain has not provided us with any non-question-begging reason to become nonconceptualists.

This paper has argued that *even if* the so-called re-identification condition isn't weakened or modified, still the argument from fineness of grain fails to make the case for nonconceptualism. If RC holds, then some (demonstrative) beliefs will have nonconceptual constituents. And if some beliefs have nonconceptual constituents, then the argument from fineness of grain hasn't succeeded in showing that experience is unlike belief in that *it* (and not belief) is partly nonconceptual. The upshot for the nonconceptualist is this: either she should reformulate the fineness of grain argument without appealing to RC at all, or she should give up on the fineness of grain argument, despite its prominence, and attempt to support nonconceptualism in some other way.³⁴

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NOTES

¹ See Dokic and Pacherie 2001; Tye 1995; 2000; 2006; Peacocke 2001, and for discussion Bermúdez and Cahen 2008, Chuard 2006.

² This is, as mentioned, a rough characterization. For a qualified one, see Section 1.2.

³ Such as, e.g., arguments from richness—see Tye 2000, Dretske 1995.

⁴ The terminology is from Heck 2000.

⁵ In the paper, capital letters will be used for concepts to emphasize that there need be no commitment, in these discussions, to claims about the *ontology* of concepts. Whether concepts turn out to be abstract constituents of propositions or mental representations, the arguments in these debates can be deployed.

⁶ Despite acknowledging that the debates are logically independent, authors such as Bermúdez (2007) have argued that they are importantly related. Whether or not Bermúdez is right should have no bearing on the central thesis of this paper.

⁷ It is also worth noting that it is possible for a content-conceptualist to claim that a concept is a constituent of a subject's experience even if the subject in question does not *possess* the concept, i.e., cannot token a *belief* which takes the concept as a constituent. See, e.g., Byrne 2005.

⁸ See also, Bermúdez 2007. Such projects further assume that *beliefs* lack characteristic phenomenology—though it should be noted that it is by no means obviously true that there is no *cognitive* phenomenology (see Bayne and Montague's (2011) anthology for discussion).

⁹ Worries about the debate so construed are discussed in some detail in Section 3.2.

¹⁰ Note that the argument from fineness of grain cannot make the case that the content of experience is *wholly* nonconceptual. The fact that it is *partly* nonconceptual, however, is enough to warrant a *nonconceptualist* conclusion: that experience and belief are states of a different *kind*.

¹¹ The condition is sometimes stated as a condition on concept *possession* (including by Kelly 2001, and Dokic and Pacherie 2001). But possessing a concept, on even the most minimalist construal, is to be able to token a *belief* with that concept as a constituent. Our concern here, however, is whether concepts can be constituents of *experience*.

¹² Chuard's explicit statement of this 'strong' RC, only includes conditions (i)–(iii), though he clearly thinks it includes conditions (iv) and (v) as well. See Chuard 2006: 195 (notes 6 and 7).

¹³ The relevant perceptual properties are properties of *objects* that can be represented—accurately or not—by subjects in experience and in thought.

¹⁴ Chuard calls this type of recognition *de dicto* re-identification and contrasts it with *de re* re-identification which doesn't require that subjects be *aware* that the property they've just identified was the same one they identified earlier (2006: 168–9).

¹⁵ Note that requirements (iv) and (v) may be intimately related: it may be to ensure that condition (iv) is met—that subjects can re-identify properties such as shade only based on their experience of that shade and memory—that, as (v) states, an interval of time between t and $t + 1$ is required. After all, insisting that there be an interval of time during which the subject S has no experience of the relevant property will make it less likely that S is re-identifying the shade at $t + 1$ merely based on the tracking of its location (and not based on the experience of the property itself). Still, merely requiring an interval of no experience does not guarantee that the subject's re-identification of green₁₇ at $t + 1$ will in fact only be based on her experience of the shade and memory: as described earlier, it is possible for Lisa to memorize the location of the drop, and therefore to re-identify the shade after an interval of no experience. So both conditions (iv) and (v) need to be met, for a subject to really meet RC.

¹⁶ The importance of memory storage is made explicit in Dokic and Pacherie 2001 who claim that it makes thinking (i.e., inferences) possible; and by Chuard 2006 who criticizes this feature of RC specifically in his thought-experiments (Chuard 2006: 183–4, 189–90, 192–3).

¹⁷ Presumably, RC doesn't apply to concepts that pick out perceptual properties that cannot be, as a matter of principle, re-identified, such as THIS INSTANTENOUS OBJECT. Thanks to an anonymous referee for the *European Journal of Philosophy* for pointing this out.

¹⁸ I am merely claiming here that RC is not a plausible condition on deferential concepts—something which Kelly himself notes (2001). Importantly, I am *not* claiming that *all* non-deferential concepts therefore must meet RC. It is indeed possible for an expert to have non-deferential concepts of unperceivable properties (like being just, or being God). I come back to deferential concepts in Section 1.3.

¹⁹ Notice that the argument from fineness of grain shows, at most, that experience is partly nonconceptual—as opposed to *wholly* nonconceptual. Indeed, even if it turns out that fine-grained properties must be represented in experience nonconceptually, it isn't usually argued, in discussion of the argument, that experience represents fine-grained properties *only*. It remains a possibility, then, that experience could represent coarse-grained properties (like *being a tree* or *being a car*) conceptually.

²⁰ He writes 'it's possible to imagine, and we may even be capable of, making perceptual discriminations in cases in which we fail to satisfy the criteria on possessing demonstrative concepts for the things discriminated' (2001: 402–3).

²¹ Of course, Pacherie and Dokic go on to argue that the demonstrative state-conceptualist move fails.

²² This is McDowell's (1994) strategy among others (Brewer 2005, etc.)

²³ Though he admits he isn't presenting any 'conclusive arguments' for that conclusion, merely a number of considerations in its favour.

²⁴ The assumption that there are only three possible ways of representing a fine-grained property conceptually can be questioned (see Section 3).

²⁵ This amounts to eliminating requirements (iv) and (v) from the statement of RC.

²⁶ I leave aside here the question of whether concepts form a *natural* kind—Machery 2009 has recently argued that they do not. This is compatible with the claims made in this paper.

²⁷ I do not mean to suggest that RC is the only plausible characterization of concepts. The aim of this paper, however, is to argue that RC, which plays such a central role in arguments of fineness of grain, does not actually entail the truth of nonconceptualism.

²⁸ Levine references Pylyshyn 2003, who also uses the pointer analogy in discussing the early visual system.

²⁹ Clearly, claiming that RC isn't in fact a condition on demonstrative concepts (à la Chuard) isn't an option. Indeed, as mentioned earlier, such a move *undermines* the argument from fineness of grain by leaving open the possibility that subjects represent fine-grained properties in experience *using demonstrative concepts*. And remember that the aim of this paper is to argue that *even if* RC remains a condition on demonstrative concepts (something which critics of the argument usually deny with devastating implications for the nonconceptualist), the argument from fineness of grain *still* fails to make the case for nonconceptualism.

³⁰ Thanks to an anonymous referee for the *European Journal of Philosophy* for pressing me on this point.

³¹ Presumably, such a subject could not think *that this is the perfect shade for my poster*, since she cannot think with the concept SHADE. She would presumably then not utter (S1) either, but instead may utter: (S2) This is pretty.

³² I do assume here that the *only* remaining possibility is that the relevant fine-grained property would be represented by something that is not a concept. Now it is actually possible for someone to insist that, since the subject lacks a concept to pick out the fine-grained property, the subject simply *cannot think about* the property. (Thanks to an anonymous referee for the *European Journal of Philosophy* for pointing this out). When this subject utters the demonstrative sentence (S2) This is pretty (see note 31), she simply fails to express a thought that is about the determinate shade of green. However, it is not clear what non-question-begging reasons we would have for thinking that the subject fails to think about the relevant shade.

³³ The definite description will contain some indexicals, of course, as in 'the shade I am perceiving *now*.'

³⁴ Many thanks to Peter Carruthers, Georges Rey, Ryan Millsap, and an anonymous referee for the *European Journal of Philosophy* for their insightful suggestions. Thanks also to the audience of the APA session during which I presented an earlier version of this paper and especially to Philippe Chuard for being a most helpful commentator.

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